

Old City Hall (Heritage Center)
Penn Square
Lancaster
Lancaster County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1343

HABS

36-1343

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

NAME:

Current Name: Heritage Center

Original Name: Public Offices

Common Historical Name: Old City Hall

Note: This building also has been called the "State House" at times in its history.

This building, located in the Center of the City - Penn Square, is presently owned by Heritage Center of Lancaster County, Inc. Currently, it is used as a heritage museum.

Note: A National Historic Shrine - also part of local Historic District.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The present Heritage Center building on the northwest corner of Lancaster's Penn Square is a well known, and justly esteemed, local landmark that possesses many dimensions of historical and architectural significance. In the historical context this building is unique for the community in that it has served roles in county, state, and City government. Built between 1795 and 1798 as the Public Offices by Lancaster County, it was intended as an office building for the County at the time when the Courthouse was located in the exact center of Penn Square. (The first Lancaster County Courthouse in the center of Penn Square was built in the 1730's; it burned in 1784. The second Courthouse in the center of the Square was built between 1784 and 1787 and was razed in the Spring of 1853). When the Pennsylvania capital moved from Philadelphia to Lancaster in 1799, the Legislature was given the use of the Courthouse, and some parts of the Public Offices were allocated to various state government offices. When the seat of state government moved from Lancaster to Harrisburg in 1812, the Public Offices returned to its original role as an adjunct structure to the County Courthouse. At the time of the construction of the present Lancaster County Courthouse at the northwest corner of East King and North Duke Streets in 1852-1855, it became apparent that the County no longer needed the space of this building. On November 13, 1854, the Public Offices building was sold to Lancaster City; on March 9, 1855, Lancaster City Council officially changed the name of the building to "City Hall". From this time through 1931, the structure was Lancaster's City Hall. After the dedication of the former Post Office building on the second block of North Duke Street as the Lancaster Municipal Building on January 1, 1932, some City offices remained in the old structure on Penn Square. After lengthy study and negotiations which commenced about 1969-1970, title to the building was transferred from Lancaster City to the Heritage Center in 1973. The building, along with the second floor of the former Masonic Lodge Hall adjacent to the west, now serves as a museum of local art from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The architectural significance of this structure is rich and multifaceted; it may be outlined as follows:

1. This is the sole Georgian style governmental structure from the eighteenth century now remaining in Lancaster City or County.
2. As built in 1795-1798, the Public Offices (Old City Hall) illustrated the impact of Philadelphia based tastes on Lancaster architecture.

3. As built in 1795-1798, the building shows the almost total adoption of English architectural styles by Lancaster artisans of Germanic lineage.
4. As built in 1795-1798, the structure showed a transition from the Georgian style to the newer Federal style. Some aspects of this transitional style remain today: the overall form and character is in the Georgian tradition, whereas the pedimented doorway facing Penn Square shows the influence of the Federal style in its delicate moldings, thin pilasters, and use of oval and semicircular shapes.
5. As it now stands, this building represents the unified and cumulative creation of many prominent Lancaster craftsmen and architects, including the joiners John Lind and Jacob Flubacher in the 1790's, the contractor-builder Joshua W. Jack in the 1850's and the restoration work of the architect Melvern R. Evans in the 1920's.
6. In its context on the northwest corner of Lancaster's Penn Square, this building enjoys a unique proximity to several very important Lancaster Buildings, including the following: the former Masonic Lodge Hall immediately adjacent on West King Street, built by the Lancaster joiner Gottlieb Sehner (Sener, Soehner) in 1798-1799, and restored by C. Emlen Urban (1863-1939) in the 1930's; the 1889 Central Market, designed by James H. Warner and built by John Adam Burger; and the 1924 Griest Building, designed by C. Emlen Urban. (It is interesting to note that Gottlieb Sehner (1751-1799) was the builder and original occupant of the c. 1787-1789 Sehner-Ellicott-VonHess House at 123 North Prince Street in Lancaster).
7. In the restoration work done to the exterior of the building in 1924, financed by M.T. Garvin and supervised by the architect Melvern R. Evans (1885-1971), this building may be regarded as one of the first serious restorations which sought accuracy of appearance in Lancaster City and County.
8. Due to its close spatial relationship to the Romanesque Revival style Central Market of 1889 and the City's sole skyscraper, the 1924 Griest Building, the Old City Hall presents an unusual and instructive comparison of architectural styles spanning nearly six generations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION - PHYSICAL HISTORY

1. DATE OF ERECTION:

Following the completion of Lancaster County's second brick Courthouse in the center of Penn Square in 1787, it became apparent that additional space was needed for County Offices and the storage of records. The Grand Inquest of the Lancaster County Courts ordered in May, 1794 that "...such public buildings shall be erected on solid ground of two stories high... "If" ...the Corporation of the Borough of Lancaster will grant... part of the ground allotted for the Market place..." On January 1, 1795, it was agreed by the Borough that the County "...may erect a building for the Public Offices on the present scite (SIC) of the Market House..."

On the same day, the County Commissioners ordered that a "Plan or plans for the same building..." be obtained. In the last week of January, 1795, the commissioners issued contracts for bricks and bricklaying, and on February 24, two joiners were contracted. It appears that most structural work on the building was finished by the summer of 1797, although the joiners were not contracted for the two original pedimented doorways - one facing West King Street and the other facing Penn Square (east) until August 1, 1797. The bill for exterior iron railings was not submitted to the County Commissioners until November, 1798, indicating that some work extended into that year.

ARCHITECT:

As is usually the case for structures erected in the American Colonies and the early Republic in the eighteenth century, it appears that the Old City Hall (original Public Offices) was not the creation of an architect in the modern sense of a professional designation. It is most likely that the basic designing of most major features was done by the Lancaster Borough (present City) joiners John Lind (1761-1823) and Jacob Weidman, and the Casper Brunner (bruner) - about the general design. Moreover, it is relatively certain that the joiners collaborated with some Philadelphia master builders in the production of the design; the County Commissioners reimbursed Flubacher for a journey to Philadelphia to "Consult with carpenters...about ye Plan of ye Public Offices...".

Both Lind and Flubacher were eminently qualified to design and fabricate this building. John Lind was the son of a joiner of north German or Swedish origins, Michael Lind (1725-1807), who came to America in 1752, and settled immediately in Lancaster. At least three of Michael Lind's sons - Michael II, John, and Conrad, were joiners. It is interesting to note that of the small body of signed or documented pieces of Lancaster Chippendale furniture which are now (1981) known, four are signed by members of the Lind family. About 1810, John Lind retired from woodworking trades and became a tavernkeeper. Jacob Flubacher (1755/6-1821) was, like Lind, of Germanic lineage and a member of Lancaster's First Reformed Church. Apparently the County Commissioners favored Flubacher's work, for he did carpentry on County buildings from February 1795 through October, 1814. Nonetheless, Flubacher died in somewhat reduced circumstances in Lancaster in October, 1821.

No drawings or sketches by either Lind or Flubacher for this building are now known to survive. Contracts, specifications, and bills are cited in the bibliographical section.

BUILDER:

As was noted above, the joiners John Lind and Jacob Flubacher were the chief craftsmen in the original construction of 1795-1798. According to an agreement of January 25, 1795, all brick and mason work was contracted to Robert Moore. As documented by contract of January 28, 1795, bricks were purchased from Casper Brunner (Brunner) of Lancaster County. On March 25, 1795, the County Commissioners agreed with Conrad Witmayer, Christian Witmayer, Jonas Metzger Sr., and Jonas Metzger Jr. "to hue (SIC) and cut all the free stone..." (These four men were all local craftsmen). Nathaniel Hantch (1749-1821), a Lancaster whitesmith, was contracted for "Handrails and

banisters" for the exterior on November 3, 1795; he submitted his bill in November, 1798.

ORIGINAL PLANS: The original appearance of this building, as completed about 1798, may be envisioned from structural evidence, the interpretation of Lind and Flubacher's detailed bills, and a partial view of the building's east gable end seen in a c. 1804-1805 watercolor done by the noted architect Benjamin H. Latrobe. The chief differences between the original appearance of the east and south elevations of the structure and its present day appearance are two: the building originally was two stories in height, and in addition to the pedimented doorway facing Penn Square, there was a matching doorway in the center of the five bay or southern elevation fronting on the first block of West King Street. Exterior features that would have appeared the same in 1798 and today include the brick walls, set in Flemish bond with molded brick water table, the cut stone belt course between the first and second floors, the stone flat arches with prominent central keystones over all first and second floor windows, and the twelve over twelve window sash. Originally, there were shutters - all panelled - only on the first floor level. The original cornice for the two story high building was of wood, ornamented with "dentils and fret..." on the gable and facing east (Penn Square) was a pent eave giving the form of a pediment to the attic level of this three bay, eastern elevation.

ALTERATIONS & ADDITIONS: In the long history of this structure there have been numerous additions, alterations, and restorations, which may be summarized briefly as follows:

Addition to the third Story:

Documentation for the time - and reasons - of the addition of the existing third floor of this building to the original two - story structural fabric has eluded the searches of several local historians. Definitely, the third story was present in 1854, for it is noted in the deed of that year when the County sold this structure to the City. Moreover, the third floor is mentioned frequently in City Council Minutes between 1854 and 1860. It also appears on the earliest photographs of the building, which date from the Civil War era.

It would stand to reason that this addition would be documented in the minutes of the County Commissioners sometime between 1798 and 1854. However, in that entire period, no discussions or itemized bills for such an addition were ever mentioned by the Commissioners. However, on October 6, 1809, citing a decision of August 28, 1809, the County Commissioners advised an "...Appropriation of \$500. out of the County Stock for the purpose of defraying the expenses of enlarging the Courthouse for the Use of the Legislature..." If this order is interpreted strictly, it would apply to the lost brick Courthouse in the center of Penn Square in which the Pennsylvania Legislature sat from 1799-1812. However, there is very strong documentary evidence that this Courthouse never was enlarged after its original c. 1787-1789 erection. Stylistic evidence that could support this interpretation includes the matching of sills and flat arches of the

third floor windows to those of the lower floors, the form and detailing of the circular window at the attic level on the east elevation, and the corbelled brick cornice utilizing bricks with coved and quarter-rounded profiles. (Such bricks match the profiles of those commonly used for crowning water tables, and few brick water tables were built in Lancaster after c. 1815-1825). Moreover, the color and general size of the bricks on the third floor level closely matches that of bricks on the two lower stories. However, it should be noted that the bonding on the third floor level is all common bond, which seems inconsistent to the quality and style of the total structure. However, this use of common bond could be interpreted as a measure intended to reduce construction costs.

In brief, the dating of the third floor addition remains open to further analysis and research. The 1809 date - never suggested before - is at least plausible. If this 1809 date is correct, it would indicate an unusual cooperative endeavor by the County and State.

Changes of the 1850-1900 period

After purchase by Lancaster City in 1854, many parts of the interior were modified in the 1850's to accommodate offices. Most of these changes were planned by the Lancaster builder-contractor, Joshua W. Jack. Mr. Jack was associated with the construction of many buildings in Lancaster City at the mid 1800's, including the present sanctuary of the First Reformed Church. In September, 1854, the City Council approved the removal of the fireplaces and chimneystacks for the installation of a furnace; the simulated chimneystacks now seen on the east and west gables may date from this time. Roof repairs were ordered in 1855, and new joists and girders for the third floor level were ordered on November 2, 1858.

The earliest known photograph of the exterior of the Old City Hall, dating from the Civil War era, shows white or off-white paint or whitewash covering all the bricks; with the pedimented doorway on the east gable end being intact, and clear marks of an apparently then-recent removal of the pedimented doorway in the center of the West King Street elevation. By the mid 1880's, as documented by a photograph published in 1887, the original window sash had been replaced by two over two sash, the pedimented doorway facing the Square had been removed, and all the shutters had been discarded. From the late 1800's through the second decade of this century, some exterior doors and first floor windows also were altered or relocated.

Restoration of exterior in 1924

Perhaps spurred by an article published in 1918, interest in this building increased in the early 1920's. Through the public-spirited generosity of M.T. Garvin, owner of a then-prominent Lancaster store, the architect Melvern R. Evans (1885-1971) was commissioned to restore the exterior of the structure to its approximate original appearance, with allowance for retention of the third floor. For this work done in 1924, Evans was guided by the 1860's period photograph, plus original contracts and bills. For the restoration of the pedimented doorway facing Penn Square, Evans had the early

photograph, plus the stipulation in the 1797 contract that the doorways for the east and south elevations be copies from the doorways on Jasper Yeates' "New Houses" on South Queen Street. These "New Houses" were the paired residences built as investments by Yeates in 1783-1785 at the northwest corner of South Queen and West Mifflin Streets; both houses were demolished within the past thirty years. Although these c. 1783-1785 doorways were gone by 1924, the appearance of one doorway could have been known to Evans through a clear late nineteenth century photograph.

Among the most accurate aspects of Evans 1924 restoration work may be numbered the use of panelled shutters on the first floor level, the restoration of the central pedimented doorway on the east gable elevation, the careful treatment of the brickwork and mortar joints, and the installation of twelve over twelve window sash. Liberties taken by Evans included the omission of the pedimented doorway on the center of the south elevation, the installation of panelled shutters on the second and third floors, and some details of exterior hardware. The present balustrades on the top of the gable roof are also part of Evans work, but they at least approximate the features seen in the c. 1860's photograph.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The important aspects of the uses of this structure for County, City, and State government have already been treated in the statement of significance. Indeed, it is likely that this is the only building in Pennsylvania with the exception of the Independence Hall complex in Philadelphia that has ever served so many levels of governmental functions.

This building certainly is an important monument in local history due to its longevity and its strategic position. It has witnessed the visits to Lancaster of several United States Presidents, including Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Jackson. It served as a County Office when James Buchanan, the only United States President from Pennsylvania, launched his career as a young attorney during the second decade of the nineteenth century. The Old City Hall also is one of the few buildings extant in the City that was present at the time of Lafayette's visit.

In addition to its historical and architectural significance, and these diverse associations, the Old City Hall has played intermittent roles in local culture and communications since the 1850's. When the City purchased the building in November, 1854 for \$650.00, a portion of the east side of the first floor was allocated as the Post Office. Postal facilities remained there until the early 1890's. Some of Lancaster's first telephone transmission facilities were located in the garret and on the roof of this building during the 1880's. In view of the building's present function as a regional museum, it is interesting to note that in the 1850's one room of the third floor was given to the City School Board by City Council, for educational purposes. On August 3, 1858, City Council allocated the remainder of the third floor for the use of "Literary, Scientific, and Benevolent Associations". One of the most unusual functions at this time was the establishment of a small, albeit short-lived, museum on the third floor; little is known about the nature or extent of its

collections. Apparently this museum was sponsored by the wealthy Lancaster attorney and politician, Emanuel Carpenter Reigart; the father of the noted engineer and artist David M. Stautler, was the curator or overseer for this collection. By the late 1860's, this museum evidently had ceased to function. Despite the rather uncertain roles of the educational and museum-type functions for the third floor of the building, they do establish a thin chain of continuity that relates to the present function of the entire building.

Finally, the very history of the preservation and restoration of this structure is an important part of the largely unrecognized background of the preservation movement in Lancaster County. Most likely, the building survived through the third quarter of the nineteenth century by virtue of the fact that it was a simple, and inexpensive, alternative to new construction. By the 1880's, the building's history and architecture were little esteemed.

For example, no mention of the building was made in 1883 in Ellis and Evans History of Lancaster County. On December 17, 1884 the Lancaster INTELLIGENCER recommended that the building be demolished to "...give place to an architectural site more in keeping with modern taste..." Although this idea did not become a fact, it is evident in photographs dating between c. 1895 and c. 1920 that the exterior condition of the entire building reached a very low point at this time. Very likely, Charles I. Landis, by writing an article about the creation of the building for the Lancaster County Historical Society in 1918, inspired new interest in the preservation of the structure. The 1924 restoration by Evans was not only the first instance of an exterior restoration in Lancaster County that sought fidelity; it may be regarded as the beginning, albeit then unrecognized, of the preservation movement in Lancaster County.

II. DESCRIPTION:

A. EXTERIOR:

Most pertinent aspects pertaining to the exterior appearance are apparent in the photographs. Additional commentary about details, materials, and evolutionary changes to the exterior have already been given in this text.

The basic structural system is one of weight bearing masonry walls with wooden joists; there have been many reinforcements and replacements. In the basement are two original stone vaults that contribute substantially to the structural soundness of the entire building.

B. INTERIOR:

Almost nothing visible remains from the original interior, with the exception of several architraves enframing first floor windows. The present chestnut staircase, leading from the first to the second floor, is a pleasing piece of joinery, with some attributes of the Queen Anne style, that most likely dates from the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Most of the present floor plan, and the woodwork of the large room on the east end of the second floor, date from the work designed by Melvern R. Evans in 1924. The current museum installations have

added carpeting, lighting, air conditioning, and display areas, but the basic floor plan created in the 1924 work is substantially intact.

C. SITE:

The facade of this building faces east bordering Penn Square. The building is situated on the Northwest corner of West King and North Queen Streets.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS:

As was noted previously, no drawings for any aspect of the building predating the early twentieth century are known to survive. Some drawings and related documents for the 1924 restoration are owned by M.R. Evans, Jr. of Lancaster, the son of the late architect. (Also refer to primary sources...)

Early Views

The following is a brief list of important views:

- c. 1804-1805 watercolor of Square by Benjamin H. Latrove; owned by the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland.
- c. 1860-1865 photograph, George Steinman Scrapbook, Lancaster Historical Society, Lancaster.
- pre 1887 photograph in W.U. Hensel, Resources and Industries of the City of Lancaster, Lancaster, 1887.
- partial view in the booklet Historical and Illustrated Sketch of Lancaster, Penna., page 74, published for Watt & Shand, Lancaster, December, 1897.
- c. 1909 view of the east gable end in Resources and Industries of the City of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, page 7, published by the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce, 1909.
- c. 1918 view, photograph collection, Lancaster County Historical Society.

Most recent photograph are owned by both the Lancaster County Historical Society and Heritage Center of Lancaster.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Primary Sources

Deed H-8-243 (1854), Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Lancaster County Courthouse.

Minutes of the Commissioners of Lancaster County, 1794-1844. (There is an apparent gap in extant Minutes from 1844 to the late 1860's). Originals

in the archives of the Lancaster County Courthouse; microfilm available at the Lancaster County Courthouse.

Minutes of the Lancaster City Council, 1854-1860; originals at the Lancaster Municipal Building.

Agreements, Bills, Contracts, and Receipts, for 1795-1798 original construction, Manuscript Collection, Vault 1, Lancaster County Historical Society.

2. Secondary Sources

Genealogical and Information Files, Lancaster County Historical Society.

Lancaster Intelligencer Journal, December 6, 1972

Lancaster New Era, December 13, 1973

The following articles in the JOURNAL OF THE LANCASTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY:

- "Tablets Placed on City Hall- December 18, 1924", Vol. 29, No.1, 1925, pp. 3-7.

Charles I. Landis, "City Hall and Its History", Vol. XXII, No. 7, 1918, pp. 107-122.

John J. Snyder, Jr., Lancaster Architecture 1719-1927, Lancaster, Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County, 1979; illustrated on page 11.

John J. Snyder, Jr., "Carved Chippendale Case furniture from Lancaster, Pennsylvania", ANTIQUES, May, 1975, pp. 964-975. This gives some information about the Lind family.

3. Likely Sources

It is to be hoped that documents that may be hidden in State Accounts for the period when the State Capital was located in Lancaster might confirm - or refute - the plausible 1809 date for the addition of the third story.

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Consulting Architectural
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Historic Preservation Trust of
Lancaster County

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